

**A MODEL FOR LOCAL CHURCH RESPONSE
TO DISASTER:
A PROJECT REPORT**

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ABSTRACT

In the Spring of 1977 a devastating flood raged through the narrow valley of the Tug Fork River in southern West Virginia. In the wake of the flood thousands were left homeless and millions of dollars of damaged property were left buried under tons of tar-like soil. Federal, state and volunteer agencies rushed into the area to give aid and assistance to the victims of this catastrophe. Another catastrophe engulfed these homeless and rootless people of the Tug Fork as the many agencies oversupplied many needs and completely refused or forgot to meet many of the more basic needs such as alleviating the pain of separation from loved ones and the psychological depression following the loss of valued possessions. The church was a part of the response team that flooded the area a second time leaving in its wake more damaged lives than the water had left behind.

As did the other relief agencies, the church looked at itself to see what could be changed to alter the confusion of an ad hoc effort every time a disaster struck people. Two church related groups, the West Virginia Council of Churches and the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church, organized within their own structures a disaster response committee assigned the duty of responding to disaster whenever and wherever it struck in the state in a coordinated and responsible meeting of needs of victims.

To achieve this coordinated response, a communications network had to be established that could reach the various local churches with information concerning the needs of a stricken area and a method of delivering supplies and manpower from the local churches and national church agencies into the area that needed it. A network was established that connected the disaster area with the local church and the outside world where help was available. As a conservation of effort and resources this network was and is viewed as thorough, tested, comprehensive and coordinated. Evaluations can be made and needs can be met quickly and responsibly.

Based on the Christian concept of responsible and compassionate love for mankind, fortified by the Biblical concepts of loving concern and obligation to reflect God's saving love for the Christian, the system was established along lines that already existed but needed clearer definition and assignment of duties. By working with District Superintendents in the United Methodist Church and with the various judicatory heads of the members of the Council of Churches, lines of communications were established and tested in an actual disaster. The results of the testing showed a built-in flexibility at the disaster site where it was needed and a clearer job assigned focus for those outside the disaster area. This combination led to a quick meeting of needs of persons caught in disaster, lowering the

frustration level of those caught in seemingly hopeless situations and speeding recovery time manyfold.

This communications network grows out of need - the needs of persons caught in disaster and the need of the church to respond as the Good Samaritan, responsibly and compassionately. The system can be adapted for the needs of any denomination or organization. Regardless of the methodology we use in responding to the needs of others, we are obliged to respond to the love of God by responding to the need for love in others.

FOREWORD

The one state in the United States most likely to be effected by a natural disaster or a disaster due to human neglect is West Virginia.¹ Because of the topography of the Appalachian Mountains (steep grades and narrow valleys), the deep shaft and strip coal mining, the lack of habitable land above 100 year flood plains, the massive chemical industry in the main river valleys (i.e., Ohio River Valley, Kanawha River Valley), the presence of the lumber industry in much of the state and national park areas, and the presence of plant and coal mine workers living close to their jobs, it is not a question of when a disaster will strike next, but where it will occur.²

For the past two years I have been involved in establishing a disaster response network in the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church. The Disaster Response Committee was established in the late summer of 1977 following the devastating spring flood in southern West Virginia in the Williamson area. It was noted by all response organizations (Federal, state, private) who were involved in that disaster that there were many needs overfullfilled (food and clothing), some needs slow in being met (temporary housing and rebuilding loans) and some needs totally neglected (counseling of disaster victims and workers, short and long term care). The West Virginia United Methodist Church joined their resources with the West Virginia Council of Churches in a temporary effort to coordinate

¹Statement of Paul Morton, Disaster Coordinator, UMCOR, speaker, Disaster Workshop at Camp Virgil Tate, W.V., November 1978.

²Ibid.

church response and meet the needs as they were found in the disaster area.

Emerging from task force status to the status of a full committee involved in disaster preparedness, the United Methodist Church began developing a response network that was intentionally designed to involve the local church in disaster response wherever it might occur in the state.

Concurrent with the United Methodist efforts to create a network for disaster response, the West Virginia Council of Churches was developing a response mechanism that would develop resources and coordinate the efforts of member judicatories in case of disaster. The coordinator of the United Methodist network was also the coordinator for the Council of Churches network. I was assigned as the "communications expert" in both groups, responsible for designing a workable model for the two networks. Subsequently I became co-coordinator in each network. Because of this shared volunteer staff, each network became reliant upon the other in theory and in actual working fact.

What is presented here is the proposed model for a disaster response communications network that was designed for the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church and the West Virginia Council of Churches. The United Methodist model can be adapted by any denomination to fit its own structure, and the Council of Churches model may be utilized by any existing or ad hoc ecumenical organization. This model is currently being used in West Virginia to enable the church to respond to disasters in cooperation with Federal, state and other volunteer disaster response organizations.

I. DEFINITIONS

dis-as'-ter, n., any event causing great harm or damage; calamity.³

Derived from the latin root astrum⁴ meaning "star" or "planet" the term "disaster" carries the connotation of fate in connection with the affect of nature (the stars, astrology) on human life and activity.⁵ The prefix dis colors the term with a negative tone that implies an effect of nature that is not agreeable or conducive to human life or activity. From this word, therefore, we are able to describe the activities of the natural world when human life is threatened or effected by minor or major catastrophe. Moreover, we can apply the term to those events which involve natural law. More specifically, when a natural law is broken or when an act of nature affects human surroundings adversely, a potential disaster exists.

Kai T. Erickson of Yale University adds a dimension of suddenness in his definition:

In social science usage as well as in everyday speech, the term refers to a sharp and furious eruption of some kind that splinters the silence for one terrible moment and then goes away. A disaster is an "event" with a distinct beginning and a distinct end, and it is by definition extraordinary - a freak of nature, a perversion of the natural progress of life. Disasters customarily leave a tremendous amount of damage in their wake, of course, but we are likely to classify that damage as an "aftermath" and assume that both physical wreckage and the human wreckage will be repaired over a

³ Webster's New World Dictionary, Modern Desk Edition (N.Y.: Collins - World Publishing Co., 1971), p. 136.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

period of time. So the two distinguishing properties of a disaster are, first, that it does a good deal⁶ of harm, and, second, that it is sudden, unexpected, acute.

Erikson is attempting to redefine the concept of abruptness as he continues to speak of the ongoing trauma of a changing society as the precursor to yet another human disaster, one in which the spirit is destroyed over a long period of time, leading ultimately to the total destruction of culture and civilization.⁷

Erickson may be accurate in his observations about the disaster of the spirit yet to come, but for those who are involved in disaster response, the more acceptable definition of disaster gives reason enough to be concerned. And so, we find a working definition of disaster as a sudden and abrupt event, cataclysmic and disruptive in scope, that causes harm, damage and perversion of the normal flow of human life.

The key to response to disasters from all agencies (Federal, state, private, church) is the harm and/or damage done to people and their surroundings. For example, an earthquake of 7.5 magnitude (Richter Scale) on a remote, uninhabited island in the Aleutian Chain in the North Pacific Ocean will cause no mobilization of national response agencies unless a tidal wave is generated that threatens life in some coastal city. The designated disaster area will not be the

⁶Kai T. Erikson, Everything In Its Path (N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 1976), p. 253.

⁷Ibid.

original point of the catastrophe, but the inhabited area where life is threatened or affected adversely. An earthquake of 7.5 magnitude centered in Los Angeles would cause immediate alert and response from all relief agencies into the point of origin of the disaster.

CLASSIFICATIONS

Acts of nature classified as potential disasters include: earthquake, hurricane, tornado, snowstorm, icestorm, thunderstorm, and rainstorm. This type of catastrophe occurs due to natural circumstances and are governed by the laws of nature. For example, when a low pressure area carrying cool air meets with a high pressure area carrying warm air, the temperature change and air circulation patterns mix in such a way that causes high winds, ice formations, and tornados.

Less easy to identify are those potential disasters which involve the violation of the laws of nature. Human acts are inevitably involved in these violations. Carelessness, ignorance, sloth, or willful disregard are main contributors to these disasters. A listing of this type of potential catastrophe would include: deep mine cave-in due to faulty ceiling bolts; dam collapse because of faulty engineering or substandard materials; radioactive leak from stored cannisters into the underground water table because of faulty knowledge or technician error; or an electrical generator's cooling tower collapse because of faulty engineering or not allowing the proper time for the concrete to cure. When the basic laws of nature such as gravity, compression, leverage and erosion are broken, potential disasters

exist if they threaten human life and well being. For example, if a deep mine shaft collapses because of improper support for the ceiling, it is a disaster only if miners are trapped inside the cave-in area. The collapse of a cooling tower wall under construction becomes a disaster if a human life is taken in its falling. The magnitude of a disaster is classified as major or minor depending on the number of human lives involved.

According to the American Red Cross,

A disaster is an occurrence such as hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, earthquake, drought, blizzard, pestilence, famine, fire, explosion, building collapse, transportation wreck, or other situation that causes human suffering or creates human need that the victims cannot alleviate without assistance.⁸

The Disaster Relief Act of 1974, Public Law 93-288 defines a "major disaster" as any

hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, tsunami, earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, drought, fire, explosion, or other catastrophe in any part of the United States which, in the determination of the President, causes damage of sufficient severity and magnitude to warrant major disaster assistance above and beyond emergency services by the Federal Government to supplement the efforts and available resources of State, local governments, and private relief organizations in alleviating the damage, loss, hardship or suffering caused by a disaster.⁹

Whether a catastrophic event effects one person or a great multitude of persons, the outcome is physical, psychic and/or spiritual

⁸Guidelines and Procedures, American Red Cross Disaster Services", ARC 2003, March 1974.

⁹Federal Disaster Assistance Administration Program Guide (Washington: U. S. Government Publishing Office, 1976), p. 1.

displacement. Whether it is classified as major or minor, there are humans involved whose needs must be met on a major and minor scale, short term and long term. Disasters are a time of crisis on all levels of existence. During this time of crisis, the people involved as victims and workers feel out of touch with themselves and the world around them. The term "disaster", although listed as a noun in the dictionary, becomes in many ways an active verb for those who find themselves involved in an event that makes them feel apart from nature, its actions, and each other.

CURRENT GROUPS INVOLVED IN RESPONSE

The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), which replaces the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration (FDAA), was created to respond to disaster victims in widespread calamities such as floods, hurricanes, and tornados. Although it has been administratively streamlined since FDAA ceased to exist in 1979, its functions are basically the same. FEMA provides:

1. Housing.
2. Unemployment assistance.
3. Food stamps, financial assistance to farmers.
4. Low-interest loans to families, ranchers, repairs and replacement of farm real and personal property.
5. Assistance with low-interest government housing.
6. Low-interest loans to individuals and business people; repairs and replacement of real and personal property (non-farm).
7. Assisting Internal Revenue Service in computing credits based on disaster-caused losses.
8. Assistance with death benefits, pensions, adjustments of Veterans Administration Insurance, home mortgages, medical services.
9. Assistance in delivering checks, applying for disability, death and survivors benefits, medicare assistance to families under Social Security Act, etc.

10. Advice and guidance on sanitary problems created by disaster.
11. Free counseling, through young lawyers section of American Bar Association.
12. Mental Health crisis counseling.
13. Insurance claims counseling.
14. Vocational rehabilitation.¹⁰

The State Office of Emergency Services (OES) is the agency in West Virginia that administers many of the Federal programs in major disasters and gives aid and coordination during minor emergencies. The resources supplied by this response group are standardized according to federal requirements making it eligible to receive federal funding. The resources available from this group are:

1. Police services (road blocks, patrolling, etc.)
2. Safeguard to public health and sanitation.
3. Fire protection.
4. Identification and care of dead, including temporary morgues.
5. Designation of hazardous buildings and areas.
6. Emergency communications.
7. Issue official warnings.
8. Enforce evacuation from threatened areas.
9. Provide means of rescue and evacuation and direct these means.
10. Organize and coordinate all state and/or local departments and local government agencies.
11. Repair and replace public property.
12. State grants, federally financed with a percent put up by the state. Provide grants in predetermined amounts to disaster victims for building and repair, household furnishings, medical needs, burial, clothing, and other "serious and necessary needs."
13. State and local health departments advice and guidance.
14. State, county, city welfare departments needs vary but is a valid referral.
15. State emergency funds.
16. County housing authority, many have local housing.
17. County, city board of education, emergency facilities, buses, etc.
18. Local assistance in debris removal, street repairs, sewers, transportation, etc.¹¹

¹⁰ Church Response to U.S. Disaster, September, 1978 Revision (New Windsor, Maryland: CWS Disaster Coordinator's Office), p. 25.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 26.

The American Red Cross is an independent, voluntary organization dedicated to performing the relief obligations entrusted to it by the Congress. It cooperates with private and governmental bodies in so doing. The Red Cross at all levels gives priority to planning for and providing assistance in disasters of any size, regardless of the number of families involved. The resources provided include:

- A. No Presidential Disaster Declaration
 - 1. Order for food supplement; distribution of commodities (if available).
 - 2. Clothing (new); referral for used clothing.
 - 3. Transportation funds for public transportation or gasoline purchase; repairs or replacement of vehicles.
 - 4. Personal or home care items: comfort kits, first aid supplies, household accessories, cleaning supplies.
 - 5. Housing: rent, deposits, utility deposits, repair or rebuild owner-occupied homes.
 - 6. Furniture: replacement of needed furniture.
 - 7. Medical and nursing: treatment of disaster-caused injury or illness, burial costs, blood and blood products, replacement of glasses, dentures, prosthesis.
 - 8. Personal occupational equipment: tools and equipment for workers.
 - 9. Counseling and case work.¹²

Church World Service (CWS) is an interdenominational group of 29 United States Protestant and Orthodox communions which responds through the Domestic Disaster Coordinator in a major Presidentially declared disaster and when requested to be involved by denominations or local ecumenical councils.¹³ The services provided by this group are:

- 1. Coordination of church response from national bodies.
- 2. Encourage the creation of local ecumenical response groups.

¹²Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹³Directory of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (Washington, DC: American Red Cross, March 1979), p. 9.

3. Provide limited emergency assistance in the form of material resources and/or funds.
4. Provide clothing and blankets.
5. Skill bank of persons available for short-term assignments as counselors, organizers, etc.
6. Act as liaison for national denominations and local religious leadership.¹⁴

The United Methodist Committee Relief (UMCOR) is the largest of the organized denominational agencies whose sole purpose is to respond in time of catastrophe. Its purpose is to function:

At the request of the appropriate body of the United Methodist Church to respond to the suffering of persons in the United States caused (primarily) by natural disaster. (Recognizing that interdenominational resources other than funds may be called upon, the major cost of the repair and reconstruction of the churches and other church property is assumed by an Annual Conference or other permanent bodies, if necessary, on the strength of initial funding by the United Methodist Committee on Relief, in accordance with agreements or plans prior to the raising of designated funds.) Such response shall be made in cooperation with interdenominational agencies whenever possible. The response of the United States shall be limited to the meeting of human needs growing out of natural disaster.¹⁵

Through its locally organized Conference Disaster Response Teams, UMCOR can supply professional staff, volunteers for cleanup, food, clothing, temporary shelter, equipment, transportation, and counseling services while the umbrella organization supplies professional staff and funds.¹⁶

¹⁴Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1976 (Nashville, United Methodist Publishing House), Section 1119.3.

¹⁶Church Response to U.S. Disaster, op. cit., p. 36.

The Salvation Army is only one of the many religious groups that responds to disasters on a short term basis. They can quickly mobilize their resources which include:

1. Spiritual counseling of bereaved, injured, and distressed.
2. Family counseling and casework services.
3. Registration and identification of victims.
4. Medical assistance.
5. Temporary shelter and feeding in Salvation Army institutions or Salvation Army operated facilities.
6. Mobile feeding - hot meals and/or snacks for victims and workers at scene of disaster.
7. Collection and distribution of donated goods for victims: food, clothing, furniture, medical supplies, building materials, bedding, utensils, tools, etc.¹⁷

The Mennonite Disaster Service is the typical response of most denominations. Because of minimal resources they have chosen to specialize in their response to disasters. The services they supply are:

1. Cleanup of homes and properties after natural disaster.
2. Repairs, temporary and permanent, for the elderly and the underinsured.
3. Rebuilding and reconstruction for low-income and poverty families and disadvantaged minorities, widowed and the handicapped.¹⁸

¹⁷Directory of Voluntary Organizations, op. cit., p. 13.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 11.

This response is typical in that instead of trying to meet all of the needs of disaster victims with limited resources, this group, like Catholic Relief Agencies, B'nai B'rith, Church of the Brethern, and the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., have chosen one or two areas of response in which they concentrate their efforts.

There are other response mechanisms, but these are the major groups that one would expect to find in a local disaster area. All of these agencies are interested in responding to the survival needs of the people caught in a disaster. Food, clothing, and temporary shelter are common needs. Some, like the Federal and state agencies, are concerned with helping the victim rebuild his or her life in a material way. They provide grants and loans to rebuild or repair damaged property. A few are involved in long term response that goes beyond meeting survival needs or replacing property. These agencies are concerned with the adjustment of the victim after the disaster has occurred. There is always a severe displacement for some victims who have lost possessions that were worthless in a monetary sense (i.e., a photo album of one's family, a pressed rose) but are irreplaceable in terms of personal importance and ground for being. These persons, too, must be helped to rebuild a life that has been severely displaced. The church has a special mission to them.

II. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Historically, mankind has seen in the world around him the working of some unseen force that was beyond his control. He could placate with ritual, sacrifice, and worship, but if it was the will of the gods to destroy, man had little or no control over the actions of nature around him. The worship of gods of nature (i.e., wind, rain, sun) by ancient peoples attest to an ongoing acceptance of a power greater than mankind. In this sense, disasters that befell the people were viewed as acts of the gods, and somehow the anger of a particular diety had been aroused.¹⁹

The Hebrew tradition understood one god to be the source of all things. He was creator, provider, benefactor, supplier, and ruler of life. It was He who was the source of disaster as punishment. It was He who set things in motion to test faith and to reward or punish the evil doer, the sinner, the breaker of the law. An element of hope was a part of this vision of a wrathful God. This vision included the hope of a savior and a brighter future. This tradition is extended and expanded in the Christian tradition.²⁰

¹⁹Campbell, Joseph, The Masks of God; Occidental Mythology (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1964), p. 4.

²⁰Bright, John, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 136-141.

The involvement of the church as the extension of the body of the Savior provides the grounding for a Christian response to disaster. Based on the Judeo-Christian tradition we find this involvement mandated by Old Testament beliefs in hope and the New Testament teachings and traditions of Christian love and charity as an acceptable reflection of God's love and the grace freely given to man.

OLD TESTAMENT TRADITIONS

Even though there are many notable examples of the Hebrew tradition of coping with adversity (Torah, Job, Psalms) one group of writings draws our minds not only to the judgement of God but to the hope for the future God has supplied as well. Within the writings of the prophets we read of impending doom as the judgement of God upon a sinful people who have intentionally broken the covenant law. We also find in these same writings full and obvious expressions of hope for salvation through repentance and intervention.

From the prophet Isaiah we read:

For the Lord of hosts has a day
 against all that is proud and lofty,
 against all that is lifted up and high;
against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up;
 and against all the oaks of Bashan;
against all the high mountains,
 and against all the lofty hills;
against every high tower,
 and against every fortified wall;
against all the ships of Tarshish,
 and against all the beautiful craft.
And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled,
 and the pride of men shall be brought low;
 and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.
And the idols shall utterly pass away.
And men shall enter the caves of the rocks
 and the holes of the ground
from before the terror of the Lord,
 and from the glory of his majesty,
 when he rises to terrify the earth.

Isaiah 2:12-19 RSV

Because of sin (Isaiah 1-3) the people have been given the ultimatum from God through the prophet that destruction will be total and devastating. However, hope is held out to these sinful people in the form of one who can save them.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
 and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
 And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
 the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 the spirit of counsel and might,
 the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
 He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
 or decide by what his ears hear;
 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
 and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
 and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth,
 and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the
 wicked.
 Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist,
 and faithfulness the girdle of his loins.
 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
 and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
 and the calf and the lion and the fattening together,
 and a little child shall lead them.
 The cow and the bear shall feed;
 their young shall lie down together;
 and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
 The suckling child shall play over the hole of the asp,
 and the weaning child shall put his hand on the
 adder's den.
 They shall not hurt or destroy
 in all my holy mountain;
 for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 11:1-9 RSV

The prophet here paints a picture of unprecedented and unnatural
 worldly peace and harmony brought by one who seems specially chosen
 by God for this task. A new age is coming, Isaiah continues (verses
 10-16), which will be a reward for the righteous. The message is clear
 in the words of Isaiah: it is God's will to punish the wicked but it
 is also His will to reward the righteous (those who have kept His law).²¹

Another form of hope exists for the people of Israel. This
 hope is contained in the message of impending doom and ultimate hope
 found in the writings of the prophet Jeremiah.

²¹Ibid., pp. 262-263

For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who begot them in this land: They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented nor shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth.

Jeremiah 16:3-4 RSV

This terrifying prediction of death and desecration for the people of Israel was a warning for them to turn from their sinful life to one of acceptance of God's law and sovereignty over their lives.

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intend to do to it....Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I am shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Return, every one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

Jeremiah 18:7-9, 11b RSV

And so, repentance and acceptance of the will of God through obedience to His law and acceptance of His acts of judgement are central to an understanding of any future hope for those who have broken God's commandments.

Ezekiel was another of the great prophets who brought the message of God's judgement to the chosen people.

Thus says the Lord God: Disaster after disaster! Behold, it comes. An end has come, the end has come; it was awakened against you. Behold, it comes.... Now I will soon pour out my wrath upon you, and send my anger against you, and judge you according to your ways; and I will punish you for all your abominations.

Ezekiel 7:5-6, 8 RSV

From this passage we come to clearly understand that it is man's sinful actions that cause God's anger and it is God who is the source of disaster.²² Hope is held out in a different form in the following passage:

Thus says the Lord God: I will gather you from the peoples, and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And when they come there, they will remove from it all its detestable things and all its abominations. And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 11:27-20 RSV

Through God's intervention and through His own will, therefore, salvation is possible. As a gift God will make the hearts of the people one so that they might obey His law.

The Old Testament presents us with a picture of a wrathful God, demanding obedience to law. However, the Hebrews understood God not as a threat but as a benevolent Father guiding and instructing in the proper way of living. Through repentance and God's grace man could seek salvation or reunion with God. Disaster was an act of God to make a point, to show error, to warn of growing wickedness because the people had strayed from the law. God is both the source of disaster and reward. He is the source of destruction and hope. He is the source of law and grace. With this understanding of the importance of law and adherence to the law as the yardstick of righteousness, the Old Testament writers looked forward to a time when God would will a

²²Bamberger, Bernard J., The Story of Judaism (N.Y.: Schocken Books, 1957), p. 36.

new order of things, a new existence where the law of God would be not one written upon books but written within the heart. This new order would be one where there would be peace, harmony and a reversal of the natural laws of the world.

NEW TESTAMENT TRADITIONS

For the New Testament writers, the prophesies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in the person of Jesus. With his teaching, his life and death, and his resurrection the first century following of Jesus understood that the savior promised by God, had truly arrived and brought with him new possibilities for the order of the world.

"Think not," Jesus said, "that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them."

(Matthew 5:17 RSV) If then Jesus was the promised savior, and if through his life and teachings we were given a model for the new order of life, then it would follow that through the will and grace of God, man was embarking upon the promised new age of peace and harmony. If this were true, then the character of the new age would not be guided by external law but by some internal standard of the heart, as Jeremiah prophesied (Jeremiah 31:31-34 RSV).

The tradition that evolved around this new standard of the heart was the spot lighting of those lifestyles that reflected God's love for man in man's actions to others. If man could share God's love with others, then that love was understood properly as a blessing from God. We see this concept of God's love irrevocably linked to the sacrifice of Jesus in the words of John the Elder in one of his pastoral letters.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation

for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

I John 4:7-12 RSV

The love and good works that we practice are because of our involvement with God and His love for us. Martin Luther, leader of the Reformation, interpreted John's words in this way:

Only when we have understood that Christian love, according to Luther, is God's own love, can we understand the deepest meaning of Luther's oft-repeated statement that a man must be blessed in order to be able to perform the good...Blessedness means no more than fellowship with God. Therefore, only one who by faith lives in that blessed fellowship with God is open to receive the supplies from above, which he is then able to pass on in love.²³

If this is true, then the church community as a community of believers in Christ, salvation, and God's love, should expend every effort to show God's love to the world in loving witness to those who are in physical and spiritual need. There is implied in Luther's view, a compulsion to love our neighbor because of the fellowship that one enjoys with God.

To understand the root of the tradition that emerged in the first century church, one must reflect upon the life and ministry of Jesus. Through his teachings, his parables, his actions, and his healing miracles Jesus established a model for living a life of loving charity and concern.

²³Nygren, Anders, Agape and Eros, (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1969), pp. 736-737.

Matthew, with his predilection for providing proof that the Messianic promises of the prophets had been fulfilled in the person of a carpenter's son, placed the Messianic Parable before the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In Matthew's account Jesus has ended the discourse to his disciples concerning the signs that precede the end of time. From his own resources²⁴ Matthew inserted a parable concerning the enthronement of the Messiah and the final judgement.

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:31-40 RSV

It was Matthew's understanding of Jesus' ministry that reaching out to others in compassion and concern formed the new basis for righteousness. In the final judgement, we are to be judged not by our adherence to law but by our willingness to love others. In loving others we have shown our love and understanding for Jesus, the Judge.²⁵ Ministering

²⁴Throckmorton, Burton H., Jr., Ed., Gospel Parallels (Camden, N.J.: Thomas Nelson, 1967), p. 162.

²⁵Fisher, Neal F., The Parables of Jesus: Glimpses of the New Age (Cincinnati: Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church, 1979), p. 108.

to those who need help was a key to Jesus' own ministry of healing. The healings of the leper (Mk. 1:40-45), the blind man (Mk. 8:22-26), and the one possessed (Matt. 8:28-34) offer only a few examples of the loving concern and disregard for self that was central in his ministry.

If a single passage were to be depended upon to give credence to the church's obligation to meet the needs of disaster victims, the parable of the Good Samaritan would provide the single most impressive proof of our duty to be involved in this crisis ministry. This parable not only provides for us a guide for righteous living in the sight of God but goes beyond the general to a specific situation in which the love of God can be shared with others.

Taken in total, the setting and the parable itself shows Christ's concern for people in crisis and it gives the mandate for our involvement. Luke has placed the parable after the return of the seventy commissioned to go before Jesus into the towns along his path and proclaim the news of salvation. They returned excited at the power that even Jesus' name had over the powers of evil. One standing nearby was a lawyer, one well acquainted with the law and the scriptures. He challenged Christ concerning the style of life required for the reward of eternal life.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down the road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on

the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 10:25-37 RSV

We see that outward obedience to law is not enough to gain entry into eternal life. If this were so, the actions of the priest and Levite shunning the seemingly dead man on the road so that they would not contaminate themselves (as the law requires with dead flesh) would have been proper.²⁶ Instead, it was the Samaritan offering aid who was acting as a neighbor should. The demand is for a new state of mind and not the clinging to static legalism. Reinhold Niebuhr understands the passage in this way:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God..." Here something is commanded and demanded. That means law. But what is commanded is a state of heart and mind, a harmony between the soul and God ("Thou shalt love the Lord thy God"), a harmony within the soul ("with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind"), and a harmony between self and neighbour ("thy neighbour as thyself") which, if attained, would exclude all commandment. Such a commandment can be understood as stating an ultimate condition of complete harmony between the soul and God, its neighbour and itself²⁷ in a situation in which this harmony is not a reality.

²⁶Ibid., p. 73.

²⁷Niebuhr, Reinhold, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Volume 1, Human Nature (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p. 286.

Niebuhr draws for us the conclusion that there is a new demand placed upon all those who would follow Christ and enjoy eternal fellowship with God. This new demand is a change of one's state of mind from the rigid discipline of static adherence to law to a more rigid discipline of seeking out the harmony that is possible with God and man where this does not exist.

Quoting from the book of law of the Hebrews (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18b) the lawyer showed that he knew the law, but his question about the identity of a neighbor leads one to believe that he did not know the heart and soul commitment demanded by the spirit of the law. It was this commitment that transformed the message of Jesus and the prophets who came before him into a way of living that was different from the traditional Hebrew view.²⁸

²⁸Ibid., p. 74.

CONCLUSIONS

The Old Testament view of God was one of a wrathful and powerful diety who punished sin and wickedness and rewarded righteousness and adherence to the law. Punishment was not to be viewed as evil but as just reward for sins committed by the community or by a person. Disasters were considered the judgement of God, an attempt to point out error and solicit repentance.

The New Testament viewpoint is grounded in the Old Testament view with the notable and transforming addition that God had sent a savior to forgive sin. This placed adherence to the law in a different light. Instead of blind obedience to the written code, now man was expected to embrace the spirit of the code, a spirit of the loving concern of God for all of mankind. Acts of goodness were a reflection of God's own goodness, thus mandating those who would follow the Savior who had freed them from sin to be concerned for all neighbors in God's creation. Catastrophy now becomes an opportunity and a test site for our dedication and devotion to God's love for us. We are called upon to exercise our love for others, not through prayer or repentance but by exercising love, a reaching out of compassion as the Good Samaritan reached out on the Jericho road. The call then, is for all who profess faith in God and in his power in our lives to reflect God's love for us in our acts of love toward others.

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO DISASTER

Christian ethics, according to H. Richard Niebuhr, begins not by asking first, "What shall we do?" but turn: instead to the prior question of the impact upon human conduct wrought by the "presence of Jesus Christ in ... our history." Before there can be a "Christian social ethic," Paul Ramsey argues, "understanding of the fundamental moral perspective of the Christian must be deepened and clarified." Even an avowed contextualist who thinks we must get our bearings in the changing actual situation is still aware, as a careful thinker, of the role played by the input of a stance: "As a theological discipline," Paul Lehmann says, "ethics involves reflection upon life, upon the cement of human society, and upon morality from the standpoint of certain theological perspectives."

All of these statements point in the same direction: Christian ethics must contend as a primary challenge with the question of its theological ground and competence, its origin in some expectation for the life and conduct of man under God distinctive in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.²⁹

So that we might find that distinctive Christian ethic that emerges out of our Judaeo-Christian tradition, we must first investigate the peculiar situation to which our efforts are addressed - responding to disaster. What are the needs of people caught in a disaster? Is there more than just physical destruction? How can we meet the needs quickly? Is there only the need that must be addressed immediately? These questions will be investigated as a grounding in the situation before we attempt to develop a moral and ethical system for addressing the problem.

²⁹Sellers, James, Theological Ethics (N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1968), pp. 31-32.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

In its manual First Aid For Psychological Reactions In Disasters, the American Psychiatric Association characterizes the typical response of the victim during and immediately after the impact period in the following way:

Persons struck by a disaster will experience many frightening feelings during the period of impact. Even though patterns of behavior have been well-established by drills and training, the immediate effects will probably produce at least a temporary period of confusion. Most persons will exhibit bodily trembling, rapid breathing, rapid pulse, shortness of breath, and the like...Right after the disaster, some persons may momentarily be unable to move, think, or be concerned about others. Only when such behavior is lasting can it be considered abnormal. However, most individuals are capable of making tremendous efforts to adjust. They merely require time, and sometimes help, to adjust to their environment, make decisions, and act.³⁰

As the APA booklet points out it is crucial for the readjustment of the victim to a new environment to have the presence of some stabilizing form or individual.

When Dr. Craig Jordan reported his experience and compiled data after the Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, disaster in 1972 (it resulted in 118 deaths, seven missing, 4,000 homeless, 500 destroyed homes, and \$50 million of property damage) he discovered a pattern of behavior among the disaster victims. This pattern included physical behavior, family relationships, interpersonal relationships within the community, and personal degeneration. These characteristics led him to formulate a picture of a disaster victim in terms of disaster syndrome.

³⁰Talkington, Perry C., and others, First Aid For Psychological Reactions in Disasters (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 1964), pp. 10-11.

Beyond the intense grief which disaster produced, there is also a wider range of psychological reactions which have been labeled disaster syndrome. These reactions vary between individuals and families and are subject to a variety of classifications by researchers.

Long-range features of disaster syndrome noted in earlier research such as that by J.S. Tyhurst include recurring dreams of the catastrophic experience; repeated short-term episodes of fatigue and anxiety; severe depression; and in some situations psychotic behavior.

In the Buffalo Creek experience these as well as other components of disaster syndrome have been present. During periods of heavy rain and storms families experience great fear, usually with the sense of impending doom. Small threats become magnified, since life can no longer be trusted...There is a pronounced guilt experience in the form of survival syndrome - the questioning of why I lived while others perished...A third feature of disaster syndrome is a reduction in the feeling level of individuals. Persons are not only less aware of their own feeling state, but also their capacity for sensitivity for others has been lowered... For those disaster victims who have difficulty in perceiving and expressing emotion there appears to be an increase in the incidence of psychosomatic illnesses.³¹

Jordan's description of psychological displacement and disorientation aptly describes the frustration and confusion that one finds on the disaster scene.

Added to this intense psychological displacement is the burden of the real loss of possessions and/or loved ones. This loss may be as big as a house or as small as a picture. It may be a father or an acquaintance from down the street. Vaughn Michael, Director of Counseling for Weston, West Virginia, State Mental Hospital characterizes the reaction in this way:

³¹Jordan, Craig, "Pastoral Care and Chronic Disaster Victims: The Buffalo Creek Experience," The Journal of Pastoral Care, September, 1976, Vol. XXX, No. 3, pp. 164-165.

When the impact of loss occurs, my observations and the data of much research conclude that persons will generally react with a sense of shock, disbelief, internal emptiness, anger, guilt, and sense of hopelessness, with an underlying anxiety state. These emotional repercussions can have a direct effect upon one's ego and personal identity. The very fiber of one's well being, worthwhileness, and life's purpose is brought into question. During this crucial period, the individual can successfully work through these feelings about self and the lost object and begin the process of recovery that may lead eventually to physical and mental health.³²

Loss of possessions, therefore, can often be associated with the loss of the ground of being. All that has been worked for, all that has gone into a relationship is suddenly gone and the individual is left with anger, frustration, and a sense of the worthlessness of life. In treating these victims Erich Lindemann suggests:

He has to accept the pain of bereavement. He has to review his relationship with the deceased, and has to become acquainted with the alterations in his own modes of emotional reaction. His fear of insanity, his fear of accepting the surprising changes in his feelings, especially the overflow of hostility, have to be worked through. He will have to find an acceptable formulation of his future relationship to the deceased. He will have to verbalize his feelings of guilt, and he will have to find persons around him whom he can use as "primers" for the acquisition of new patterns of conduct.³³

According to June S. Church and her experience of the Buffalo Creek disaster, there were steps that could have been taken that would have alleviated the emotional stress in the area after the disaster. Those in charge of recovery could have allowed for natural groupings

³²Michael, Vaughn, "Experience of Loss Incurred in Disaster," Position Paper No. II, The United Methodist Disaster Response Network, April, 1976, p. 3.

³³Lindemann, Erich, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," American Journal of Psychiatry, 101, Sept., 1944, pp. 147-148.

in the temporary housing provided. A spokesman should have been selected for the victims who could have dealt with authorities. An on-going program of training for victims by the Red Cross, church groups, police, firemen, and other response groups should have been established. A mobile crisis intervention mental health team should have been assigned to the area.³⁴ In her evaluation, the second disaster occurred in Buffalo Creek by sympathetic people who did not know the needs of those they served which left the victims twice victimized, first by the flood waters, and second by the confusion and uncertainty of those trying to help.

As implied in the Lindemann and Church statements, the victim's mental health goes beyond meeting survival needs into the area of interpersonal relationships during the crisis and afterward. These relationships can help to provide comfort, supply physical needs, and act as a model for reconstruction of the victim's personal life. As it was previously stated, these relationships are important in helping the victim of a disaster to learn to cope with a new environment and situation.

In all communities throughout West Virginia the church (regardless of denomination) is present as a physical building, as a community of persons, and as a participant in civic activities. There are over 3,500 churches in the state.³⁵ In these congregations we find a

³⁴ Church, June S., "The Buffalo Creek Disaster: Extent and Range of Emotional and/or Behavioral Problems," OMEGA, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1974, p. 63.

³⁵ Figures supplied by the West Virginia Council of Churches, January, 1980.

microcosm of the communities in which we find the churches. These persons are involved in all aspects of community work including community councils, charitable groups, and volunteer work in hospitals and fire departments. The congregations are made up of doctors, lawyers, miners, plant workers and housewives. There are young and old, male and female. This homogeneous mix in separate congregations is often united by a loose ecumenical grouping of churches or a ministerial alliance. With very few exceptions, there is no community, regardless of size, in West Virginia that does not have at least one organized congregation.

Therefore, the church is present at the time of disaster. It is present before, during, and afterward during the cleanup and readjustment period. It is present before as a community of believers witnessing to the community at large. It is present at the time of disaster and may itself be in the disaster area. It is present after all the response workers have gone to their own homes and left the victims to deal with life as it has newly been thrust upon them.

What better organization to train victims and bring a readjustment through modeling than a caring community of church workers? The use of the existing facilities of churches as shelters, the use of churches in the supplying of survival needs, and the use of church persons to help clean up, counsel and console is logically a good stewardship of resources. It also provides a sense of legitimate concern within the community of victims and workers. Vaughn Michael characterizes the sense of togetherness among the workers in this way:

The common experience of disaster workers is that the greater one utilizes the available resources, the more efficiently needs are met and the healthier the response worker feels. The sense of shared responsibility not only with

one's team members, but with the full community, lessens greatly the tendency to feel overwhelmed in the disaster setting...(Another) resource that has come into existence in my experiences in disaster settings is a growing, emerging faith. Out of the tragedies of disaster experiences there has evolved a new found faith that affirms a living God of Hope in the midst of tragedy, and despair...Due to the renewed sense of appreciation for a faith community, a place wherein my fears, hurts, and frustrations, can be lessened through an accepting love. A place wherein my doubts and reluctance for further involvements can be challenged and countered. A place wherein I can express my own hope, anticipation for change, and sense of the goodness of God and persons.³⁶

This sense of community is beneficial not only to the response worker but to those who are in contact with the worker. The victim comes to sense this feeling of loving concern spoken of by Michael. Thus a model is provided by which the victim can learn to cope with a new situation.

Reinhold Niebuhr understands the need for community as one of necessity:

Community is an individual as well as social necessity; for the individual can realize himself only in intimate and organic relation with his fellowman. Love is, therefore, the primary law of his nature; and brotherhood the fundamental requirement of his social existence.³⁷

In this statement we understand that social organization or community is the necessary outgrowth of man's need to show his love for his fellowman.

³⁶Michael, Vaughn, "Who Cares For The Disaster Response Worker," Position Paper No. IV, The United Methodist Disaster Response Network, April, 1976, pp. 4-5.

³⁷Niebuhr, Reinhold, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. II, Human Destiny (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p. 244.

ETHICAL FOUNDATION

This sense of community combined with the Biblical imperative of the Good Samaritan demands of the church a response not out of a sense of humanity but a sense of responsibility. From an ethical standpoint, that trait that is peculiarly a part of our Judaeo-Christian tradition that places responsibility upon believers is the love of God for mankind and the necessity for the emergence of that love from those who believe in God in the form of Christian loving concern for others.

The entire concept of Christian love rests upon the Hebrew tradition of a benevolent God who cares for His creation. As noted in scriptural passages this love was made visible in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Anders Nygren explained Martin Luther's concept of this Christian love in this way:

1. Christian love is spontaneous in contrast to all activity with a eudaemonistic motive...the fact that God's love for us is free and unmotivated carries with it the corollary that we love our neighbor also freely and without any selfish motivation.
2. Christian love is also spontaneous in contrast to all legalism...The law has two motives at its disposal for compelling man to an outward fulfillment of the law: fear of punishment and the desire for reward. But both of these rob the action of its spontaneous, unmotivated character, and prevent it from being a real - that is, a free and sincere - fulfillment of the inmost intention of the man. Man can live for God in the deepest sense only when he is absolutely free from the rule of the law. That which the law had to extort from him forcibly is then transformed into his free, spontaneous, willing action.
3. Christian love (is) "quellende Liebe," overflowing love. It has no need of anything at all to set it in motion from outside. It is not, like the world's love, a love aroused by the desirable qualities of its object...it springs forth out of its own source, fellowship with God.
4.God does not allow His love to be determined or limited by man's worth or worthlessness. "For He maketh

His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust." (Matthew 5:45)...The spontaneous, unmotivated, creative nature of Christian love is manifested supremely in love for enemies.

5.Christian love is by its very nature "eine verlorene Liebe," a lost love. It is the direct opposite of rational calculation. Even though again and again it finds itself deceived, that is no reason why it should become hesitant and reserved.³⁸

There is, then, a connection between God's love and the love that we are to show others. This love comes to and through us from God, according to Luther's explanation. With it must also come the reserves of strength to endure rejection and the justice with which we are to seek opportunities to exercise this peculiar kind of love.

When God's love, power, and justice are combined within a person, he finds a center for his being which may determine the direction for his activity within society. This ground of being, purpose for living and acting, center of knowledge, or whatever other characterization may be appropriate, gives impetus for living within a brotherhood of faith. Paul Tillich in his work Love, Power and Justice explains the difficulty of human institutions to determine and focus on the needs of persons within the social or community structure.

A state has often been described as a person who has emotions, thoughts, intentions, decisions like an individual person. But there is a difference which makes all this impossible: the social organism does not have an organic centre, in which the whole being is united so that central deliberations and decisions are possible. The centre of a social group is those who represent it, the rulers or the parliaments, or those who have the real power behind the scene without being official representatives...The deciding centre of a group is always a part of the group. It is not the group which decides, but those who have the power to speak for the group and force their decisions upon all the members of the group.³⁹

³⁸Nygren, Agape and Eros, op. cit., pp. 726-732.

³⁹Tillich, Paul, Love, Power and Justice (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 93.

Acting within a society or community with effective action is, Tillich contends, impossible. It is unlikely that this action will benefit all the group because there is no real unity except possibly among those who have the power of making the final decision.

Within the church community, however, the possibility exists, or should exist, for the deciding center to be of a spiritual nature.

The spiritual power (unity of God's love, power, and justice on a person) works neither through bodily nor through psychological compulsion. It works through man's total personality, and this means, through him as finite freedom. It does not remove his freedom, but it makes his freedom free from the compulsory elements which limit it. The Spiritual power gives a centre to the whole personality, a centre which transcends the whole personality and, consequently, is independent of any of its elements. And this is ultimately the only way of uniting the personality with itself. If this happens man's natural or social power of being becomes irrelevant...He may exercise Spiritual power through works or thought, through what he is or what he does, or through the surrender of them or through the sacrifice of himself...This is the power which elevates the holy community above the ambiguities of power.⁴⁰

If a person possesses that Spiritual power of God which combines loving compassion, power to overcome obstacles, and a sense of justice, then he or she becomes active in response to God's call. That center of being that gives the basis for decision unites a community of believers (e.g., the church) into a group motivated to action out of duty, obligation, and devotion to the central organic core - God.

Martin Buber in I and Thou relates the dependance of the person upon God in this fashion:

In the course of history, in the transforming of elemental human stuff, ever new provinces of the world and the spirit are raised to form, summoned to divine form. Ever new spheres become regions of a theophany. It is not man's own power

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 120-121.

that works here, nor is it God's pure effective passage, but it is a mixture of the divine and the human. He who is sent out in the strength of revelation takes with him, in his eyes, an image of God; however far this exceeds the senses, yet he takes it with him in the eye of the spirit, in that visual power of his spirit which is not metaphorical but wholly real. The spirit responds also through a look, a look that is formative. Although we earthly beings never look at God without the world, but only look at the world in God, yet as we look we shape eternally the form of God.⁴¹

Buber's expression of our obligation, our "being sent out," to share God's image and compassion for us is one that we might well investigate in the light of Christian history. Characteristically our response to the world has been a response to individuals. In our view of the world, and in Buber's view, we tend to see God in the persons of the world. H. Richard Niebuhr defines the history of Christianity as a history of events that involve persons.

In our history all events occur not to impersonal bodies but to selves in community with other selves and they must be so understood...The most important fact about the whole approach to revelation to which we are committed by the acceptance of our existential situation, of the point of view of faith living in his history, is that we must think and speak in terms of persons. In our history we deal with selves, not with concepts... Revelation means God, God who discloses himself to us through our history as our knower, our author, our judge and our savior... Revelation means that in our common history the fate which lowers over us as persons in our community reveals itself to be a person in community with us.⁴²

Our history reflects our vision of God and our vision of our commitment to the people of God's creation. Through the revelation of God within

⁴¹Buber, Martin, I and Thou, Second Edition (N.Y.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), pp. 117-118.

⁴²Niebuhr, H. Richard, The Meaning Of Revelation (N.Y.: The Macmillan Company, 1962), pp. 65, 143, 152, 153.

our lives, we come to know that we are a part of Him, and therefore, a part of His world.

Biblically we are called to love one another as God has loved us. The Christ event was the apex of that show of love. Through it a new Kingdom, promised by the prophets, began and a new age was foreseen by the death and resurrection of Jesus beyond this new world. As Christians we are living in a world of new possibilities, where God becomes the center for our decisions and where a new perspective is possible in judging world events.

SUMMARY

In summary let us look at the physical, emotional, and spiritual distress of disaster victims and the ground for church response. The physical needs, include those requirements of a person to survive: shelter, clothing, food, medical supplies, blankets, and cleaning supplies.

The emotional needs are much more subtle: resumption of normal patterns of behavior, catharsis, and relief and release from feelings of anxiety and frustration. The spiritual need, simply stated, is the finding of a ground of being upon which a new life might be built.

As we have seen, this catastrophic shaking of the roots of well being and self respect goes far beyond an immediate response of providing new "things" to replace or compensate for lost "things." Rebuilding a home does not replace the inner feeling of accomplishment of an individual when he or she steps back and views the product of a life's work. Money does not replace the vacuum of a lost loved one. The damage of a disaster is not cosmetic but involves physically and emotionally displaced persons and communities of persons working through shock, grief, anger, and frustration. For some it is more difficult to recover than for others. For some there will be no recovery.

Through the Biblical imperative of loving God and loving neighbor, the church is called to respond as an expression of God's presence within the community. In West Virginia the church is present as a part of virtually every town. It represents to those within it and around it something that cannot be fully described. It is a

landmark, a community center, a group of persons involved in worship and work for God. It is a social grouping, a fellowship of unlike people, and a fellowship of people with a common purpose and goal.

Through God's individual revelation to mankind, the church as a community of believers in that revelation carries the image of God with them as they act out God's love for the people of the world. They are, in essence, messengers of God's love. Joined by a common center, the church can act in the world in full knowledge that it is loving God in its act of loving man. With God's love and power at the center of our action and decision making processes, we need to go beyond the meeting of survival needs to provide a witness of love for those who feel the loss of love. Those persons who feel alone are the victims of disaster and our response is to serve them freely and sincerely with all the spontaneity with which God loves and serves us.

IV. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

A model was developed for effective local church response to disaster for the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church which was then modified to meet the needs of a larger response mechanism in the West Virginia Council of Churches. This model was developed in 1977 and modified after utilization in 1978. What follows is the modified model that has been field tested.

DISASTER NETWORK OF THE WEST VIRGINIA CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The basic model is a pyramid communications network that utilizes the existing structure of the organization of the United Methodist Church into cooperative parishes or small groupings of churches in clusters. The United Methodist Discipline suggests that conferences consider establishing cooperative parishes to develop coordinated church programs and ministries.⁴³ One of the styles to use in establishing these parishes is:

(6) Cluster groups - a group of churches located in the same geographic area with a loosely knit organization which allows the participating congregations and pastoral charges to engage in cooperative programs in varying degrees. A district may be divided into cluster groups for administrative purposes.⁴⁴

⁴³The Book of Discipline, op. cit., Section 206.2.

⁴⁴Ibid., Section 206.3.6.

West Virginia is divided into eleven districts which are subdivided into 95 cooperative parishes which include 1545 churches. In some cases the cooperatives interact very effectively with shared and coordinated programs. Others are paper cooperatives that have a coordinator responsible for several other churches. This latter group only operates for the administrative purposes of the district.

The Disaster Network Model (see Appendix A) utilizes the cooperative parish system to enable a two-way form of communications. In the event of a disaster, any district can operate independently of the other districts, or of the larger organization through the initiative of the District Superintendent to meet the needs of victims within its own geographical area. The District Superintendent may inform his cooperative parish coordinators of needs within the district and keep the response within his area of administration.

The parish coordinator will then inform all of the pastors of the churches in his or her parish of the needs and pass the information back to the District Superintendent of the resources (manpower, food, clothing, funds) available from the cooperative parish. This two-way communication enables the District Superintendent to assess the unmet needs and determine if a larger response is necessary.

The District Superintendent may appoint a Disaster Aide within his district to assist him in his duties. This Aide has the same responsibilities as the District Superintendent within the district and may act for him in his absence.

If, after assessing the extent of the disaster and the availability of resources within his district, the Superintendent feels that the necessary response is too large for his district to handle alone,

he may contact the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator. The Conference Coordinator will assess the damage and the needs within the disaster area with the District Superintendent and put into motion the network to amass the manpower, supplies, and funds necessary. Calls to the other District Superintendents and/or their Disaster Aides will initiate contacts with the parish coordinators who will in turn contact their churches and relay the information through the District Superintendents back to the Conference Coordinator.

If the Conference Coordinator ascertains that the magnitude of the disaster warrants a larger response than is possible from the Conference, he will contact the state and then the national response organizations (West Virginia Council of Churches and United Methodist Committee on Relief) to give assistance. A local designated person (either a local pastor or the parish coordinator), or the Conference Coordinator (or Co-Coordinator) will traffic the response of the church into the disaster area as well as organize or work in cooperation with already existing response leadership in the area (state, Federal, Red Cross, etc.).

The network acts not only as a response organ but also as a preparedness and ongoing information distribution network. Training of key persons within the parish structure facilitates the designation of a leader for the local community to coordinate the response effort coming into the disaster area. If more supplies, manpower, or funds are needed or if too much of anything (food, blankets, clothing) is coming into the disaster area, then the information can easily be disseminated throughout the Conference through the parish networks.

The Disaster Response Network as outlined for the United Methodists can operate on three different levels of response: cooperative parish, district, and Conference. In minor disasters or individual disasters like home fires, the cooperative parish can respond from within its own framework. A larger disaster beyond the capabilities of the cluster to respond adequately might be handled within the district structure. The Conference is called upon to respond to a disaster that, if not major in scope, borders on a major catastrophe.

The Conference Coordinator of Disaster Response or the District Superintendent may initiate the larger network if either or both feel that a Conference response is appropriate. Both the top level and the second level of communications function during any disaster to determine how great the scope of response should be.

DISASTER RESPONSE MODEL FOR THE WEST VIRGINIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The needs of the West Virginia Council of Churches and its nineteen jurisdictional-denominational divisions are somewhat different in emphasis and concern from the United Methodist group but not in its actual response action. Even though the response will be greater in terms of volume, it is still necessary to have some form of coordinated on-site mechanism in place. The model for individual church contact is left to the individual judicatory to model. (See Appendix B)

To allow for judicatories or denominations within the state that do not have organized disaster response committees, each judicatory head (Bishop, Superintendent, Moderator, or President) designates two

persons from their body to fulfill the functions of On-site Coordinator and Resource Coordinator. On-site Coordinators should be immediately available to go into any area to make contact with the local church persons and notify the Resource Coordinator of the needs in any disaster. The Resource Coordinator should be able to identify and acquire what the judicatory or communion has in the way of resources and send them into the affected area. The On-site Coordinator will receive the resources and coordinate their distribution in cooperation with other response agencies in the area.

Again we see that any single judicatory or denomination may address a disaster without calling upon the larger network. The Council Disaster Network exists not to circumvent the efforts of local churches to address their own problems, but to respond on a larger scale than is possible for any one smaller group.

There are two persons on the State Council level who perform the same functions as those in the smaller organizations. The Council Disaster Response Coordinator is the counterpart of the On-site Coordinator. He may enter any disaster area and assess the needs and organize an ecumenical effort to respond locally. This may be done through an existing ecumenical group or an ad hoc task force of church leaders. He will inform the Council Disaster Resource Coordinator who will contact the judicatories and determine the resources available. He may determine that the required response is beyond the capability of the state churches to handle and in collaboration with the Response Coordinator call upon the resources of Church World Service and other national church groups.

The organizational structure is flexible only at the on-site level. This uniformity and structured lines of responsibility in the upper levels allow for quick and effective response. On-site coordinators may be chosen informally to allow for indigenous persons or groupings of persons to take the responsibility of coordinating the church effort, especially when a disaster area includes more than one site. The Council Response Coordinator will designate an individual within a disaster area as the representative of the Council of Churches. This gives freedom to the Council Response Coordinator to move into other disaster areas.

SCENARIO

MID-DECEMBER, 1978 - DUNLOW, HAMLIN, MILTON, W. VA.

The unseasonal rains in mid-December, 1978 caused wide spread flooding in the southwestern portion of West Virginia. The hardest hit areas were Dunlow, Hamlin, and Milton, cities of varying size, topography, and accessibility. Each disaster site presented unique problems.

Dunlow, a small community of 400-500 persons, is scattered along a six mile long narrow valley no more than 600 feet across at its widest point. A two-lane secondary road traverses the valley along a small creek. This small creek overflowed its banks and filled the valley with nearly ten feet of water damaging many homes and sweeping some from their foundations. There was one independent, non-affiliated church in the community.

Hamlin, a community of approximately 4,500 persons, is spread out on both sides of a narrow valley no more than two thousand feet

wide. Several roads intersect in Hamlin. The Mud River overflowed its banks destroying many low-lying homes. There were several churches in the area, denominationally affiliated and unaffiliated.

Milton is located in a flat region on the Mud River between Charleston and Huntington, West Virginia's largest cities. It is located immediately adjacent to I-64. Backwater from the Mud River flooded the low-lying portions of the town of approximately 8,000. There were many churches in the area and a ministerial association.

All three communities are located in the Huntington District of the United Methodist Church. The scope of the destruction was so large that the District Superintendent determined that his district was not able to handle the situation alone. The Disaster Response Coordinator of the United Methodist Church in West Virginia was notified and he went to each of the affected areas to begin organizing the response effort. In Dunlow, because there was no United Methodist Church in the disaster area, the Wayne County Cooperative Parish was enlisted to coordinate the church response. In Hamlin a local pastor was designated Area Coordinator. In the Milton area the local ministerial association was organized to respond to the needs of the local people.

Each area had different problems with which to deal:

Dunlow

1. Extensive cleanup of debris.
2. Temporary housing and food.
3. Someone to visit the more remote areas of the valley and assess the needs of potential victims.
4. Transportation and interpretation for many residents.

5. Rebuilding of damaged homes.
6. Counseling for the victims.

Hamlin

1. Temporary housing.
2. Food and clothing.
3. Those uneffected were engaged in helping those who were effected.
4. Some debris removal.

Milton

1. Clean up of debris.
2. Temporary shelter and housing.
3. Food and clothing needed.
4. Needed a clear assessment of the damage and the needs of the affected people.

The Coordinator of the United Methodist Response effort contacted the West Virginia Council of Churches and asked that contact be made with other religious groups in the state and with national church response groups. Both the United Methodist Network and the Council Network were activated to call in counselors, workers, and some supplies.

The needs were different in each of the disaster areas separated by as much as 60 miles. Each task was addressed according to the need.

Dunlow

Clean-up crews were sent into the area from the churches in the county and from a two-county area surrounding the disaster site. Food and clothing were collected and distributed. Temporary housing

was supplied in an adjacent park and in the near-by community of Wayne. Volunteers were sent into the more remote areas of the valley to assess damage and needs and to explain to the victims what resources were available to help them in recovery. This required in some instances the reading aloud of brochures for those who could not read. Transportation was supplied by volunteers to the Federal One-Stop Center where they were aided in filling out forms. Mennonite workers were called into the area to help local volunteers rebuild. Short-term counseling was provided by local pastors from the surrounding counties.

Hamlin

Finances and supplies were distributed. The local people were interested in helping each other more effectively, so the tasks of clean up and long term rebuilding were left to the local agencies and churches to do.

Milton

Workers were brought in to assist the local ministerial association in making a house-to-house assessment of damage and needs. From the interviews with the victims, needs were prioritized according to those the local ministerial association could handle and those that needed other resources. Some food and clothing were sent in as well as small appliances. Some funds were distributed for rebuilding and in some cases for renters to relocate. A listing of persons was compiled who were judged to need some form of counseling that the local ministerial association could handle.

The West Virginia United Methodist Response Network acted as the core for the response of the Council because of its existing grass roots cooperative parish response network. By utilizing available

resources and calling upon national recovery groups, the Council of Churches was able to minister to the needs of well over 1,500 victims in a very short period of time.

When the Presidential Disaster Declaration was made, state and Federal resources became available and disaster response workers from these agencies came into the effected areas. Our church response coordinators worked in conjunction with the state and Federal agents, trying not to overlap in services but augmenting those services that were being made available by the agencies and meeting those not met by state and Federal programs. The Federal and state agencies were impressed when they moved into the area with their programs and found a response effort was already underway. We were able to supply them with accurate information concerning needs and victims involved.

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The models can be evaluated in two different segments - the United Methodist Model for West Virginia and the West Virginia Council of Churches Model.

UNITED METHODIST MODEL

The response network can work very efficiently on any of three levels. The parish, or cluster of churches, can act to meet the needs of local communities in the event of small disasters. The district can be mobilized to assist the local parish if the response necessary is beyond the capability of the parish. The Conference is called upon only in the event that the District Superintendent and/or the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator determines that the local district has insufficient resources to handle a disaster of any magnitude.

The strength of the network lies in the inclusion of local churches in meeting the needs of people down the street or across the state. This involvement and ownership of responsibility gives purpose to any effort by a local church. Disaster victims become identifiable as persons with specific needs rather than faceless victims who have some unspecified need.

Information as to needs and expectations of available resources within the local church can be communicated from and to the Disaster Coordinator over the entire Conference within a two to four hour time span. The rapid accessibility to information of this kind speeds the recovery effort so that victims of disasters can be supplied with vital survival needs in a short period of time and, therefore, the shock and immobilization periods are shortened.

As one involves more of the network up to the Conference level, the lines of responsibility become more clearly defined and the expectations within the disaster area become clearer. It is an assumption of the network system that when the Conference becomes involved in a disaster response, the catastrophe is of such magnitude that other denominations will be involved in the response. More materials and resources can then be expected to come in the area.

On the parish level, the single weakness involves the identification of the person responsible for contacting the District Superintendent and taking the initiative in the immediate response during and immediately after the disaster. This person should have some training in disaster response and be familiar with the network. The Conference is now engaged in the training of key persons in as many disaster

prone communities as possible. Infringement upon territory and overlapping of congregations sometimes poses a problem in terms of relationships after the disaster has passed.

The network can be activated by the District Superintendent or the Conference Disaster Response Coordinator. This allows for the possibility, again, of crossed communications and differences of opinion as to authority and territoriality. A relationship must exist between the Coordinator and the District Superintendent that allows for casual communications and forthright evaluation of the situation.

The on going two-way communications has the advantage of giving the initiator of the network the capability of informing the local churches when too much of any one resource begins to flow into the area. Too much food, too many blankets, etc. tend to exhaust the local churches involved of their resources. By being able to inform them of the needs as they arise, better stewardship of time and resources is achieved.

THE COUNCIL OF CHURCHES MODEL

Because of the understanding that the Council of Churches will respond only if asked by a judicatory to be involved in the response, the question of territoriality that arises with the United Methodist Model is eliminated. It is assumed that there are already response mechanisms in place or that the personnel in the disaster area are willing to cooperate with the Council Coordinators in setting up an ecumenical response in their area.

There are clear lines of responsibility and job designation associated with the tasks of the various Council leaders. Once the

Council is contacted, the upper levels of the judicatory response networks are already activated, therefore, there is no question of what is expected or what duties might be.

The use of the United Methodist Model in relating directly to the disaster site gives a flexibility to the designation of personnel within the disaster area. If there are few or no churches in the area or if there is no ecumenical group, the United Methodist Model can supply the necessary leadership because it encompasses every community in the state.

The Council of Churches can act in an ongoing response effort because of the availability of executive personnel with the Council and because of the access of an ecumenical body to funds not available to a single denomination. Church World Service will aide an ecumenical group in disaster response or will organize an ad hoc group if one does not exist. UMCOR prefers to offer its resources through an ecumenical group rather than through the United Methodist Church alone.

Because of the presence of the Council Disaster Response Network, National and state groups involved in disaster response ask for assessments and evaluations of disaster situations and rely on the Council of Churches as one of the many resources they can call upon to respond to a disaster situation. Informal agreements with FEMA and OES have enabled the Council to receive advance warning of disasters and has allowed us to be involved in the organizational meetings on the Federal and state levels. Agreements with the American Red Cross, UMCOR and Church World Service make us not only an information and organizational resource for them but enable us to call upon their resources freely in the event of a local disaster.

V. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Because of the peculiar topographies and varied industries in West Virginia, the frequency of disaster situations in the state place it as the number one disaster prone area in the United States. Because of this fact, it is not a question of when the next disaster will strike, but where.

The Biblical story of the Good Samaritan and the Messianic Parable in Matthew coupled with the Judaeo-Christian tradition of loving others as God loves us places the Christian community under the obligation to respond to the needs of others. As a reflection of God's love for all of mankind, we are called to love others (our neighbors) as He has loved us.

Sending food and clothing are meeting the most basic needs of people in disaster distress. If somehow a network or system by which Christians can respond effectively and efficiently to needs of persons who need help immediately could be designed, then it would follow that we would be witnessing more effectively and efficiently as well. If through this network not only survival needs but personal and emotional needs could be met, then the system would be of even more value as a tool for effective Christian witness.

Through the two-pronged networks of the West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church and the West Virginia Council of Churches, the church in West Virginia is becoming more prepared to meet the needs of people on all levels of their frustrations and anxieties. The church as people is now able to respond to the physical, psychological and spiritual needs of persons in distress. Response is quick,

thorough, and enables many levels of involvement. The basis for this involvement is the local church and its people.

Often the impersonal treatment of agencies concerned with the programs offered to bring relief to the physical displacement of a disaster victim, isolates the victim even more from his or her feeling about the situation. As the local church responds as a caring community, under conviction and compassion rather than obligation, interaction with the victims strengthens not only the worker's witness of God's love but allows the victims to sense a caring for the inner self rather than experiencing a brief, impersonal contact with a Federal agent. Some continuity and wholeness is placed back into a life that has been disrupted and displaced by a disaster.

The network works because of its flexibility on the lower levels of responsibility and its clearly defined upper levels. The flexibility of changing leadership on the site allows leadership to emerge and also allows for internal leadership to claim ownership of the response and responsibility for rebuilding. As training in the areas of disaster response and caring continues to be a priority of both the United Methodist Church and the Council of Churches, the communications networks will become even more efficient and effective as a warning system, a counseling system, and a resource in itself for the local church in preparing for local disasters.

As an affective Christian witness, the communications networks for disaster response have shown that the church can witness in cooperation and coordination to relieve the distress of disaster victims. The networks were established to allow for more affective witness. As the church takes seriously the mandate of Christ in his teachings, the

church also must take seriously the mandate of Christ in his sacrifice. John the Elder put it in these words: "If God has loved us, we ought to love one another." (I John 4:11 RSV) As a reflection of God's love, we can do no less than love others, and in doing so we fulfill the commandments of Christ to love one another as he has loved us.

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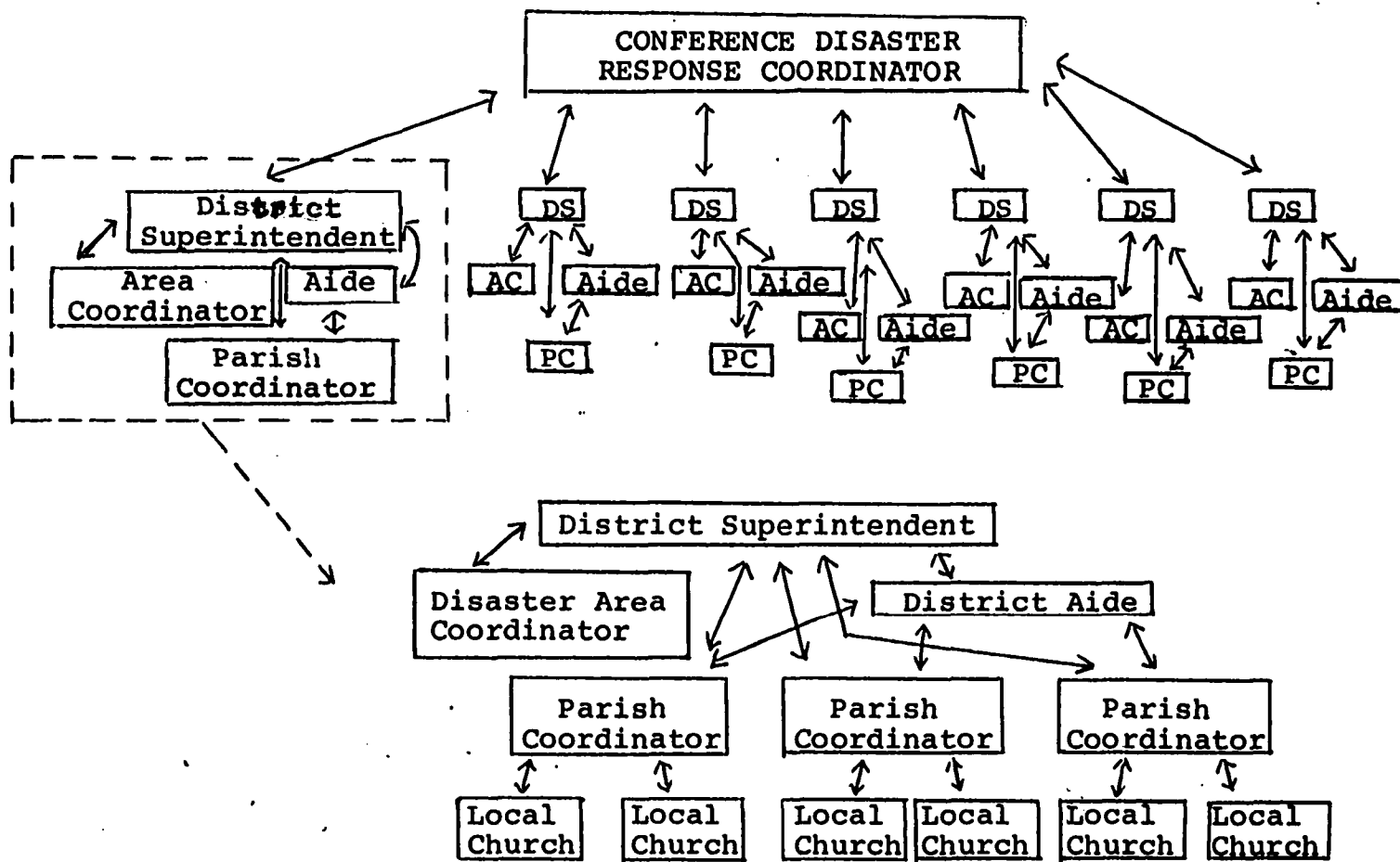
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WEST VIRGINIA CONFERENCE OF THE
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
DISASTER RESPONSE NETWORK

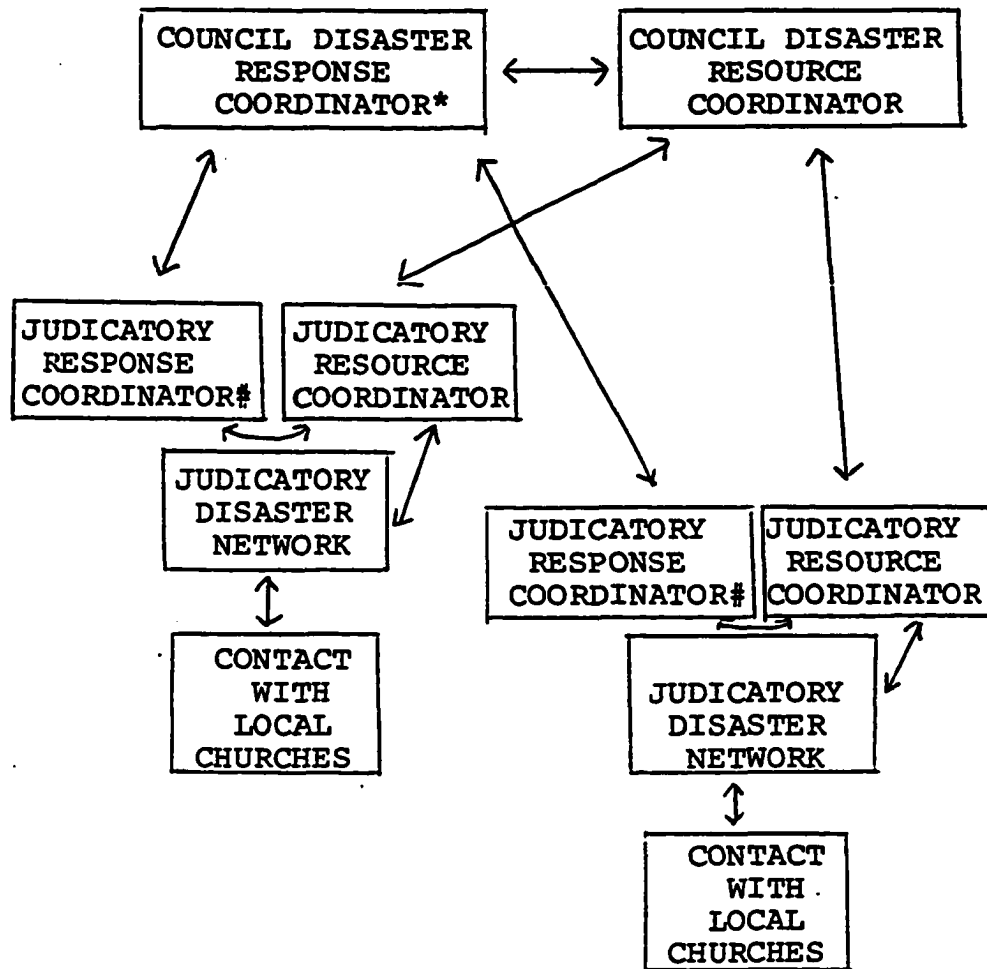
Appendix A



NOTE: This network may be expanded to include as many districts as necessary.

Appendix B

WEST VIRGINIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES
DISASTER RESPONSE NETWORK



- * Option exists to have a Council Response Co-Coordinator to act if Coordinator is not available.
- # Responsibilities may be interchanged if the Response Coordinator is not available for on-site duties.

NOTE: This network may be expanded to include as many judicatories as necessary.